



**King County**

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## **CHARTER REVIEW COMMISSION**

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**King County Charter Review Commission**  
**Regional Governance Subcommittee**  
**Briefing Paper – King County Library System**  
**Subcommittee Meeting #3 – October 29, 2007**  
NCOB, 5:30 pm – 7:30 pm

### **Table of Contents**

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Overview of the King County Library System .....            | 1  |
| Governance .....  | 2  |
| Issues .....  | 3  |
| Ad Hoc Group of KCLS Patrons .....                          | 3  |
| Reports and other resources .....                           | 3  |
| Board Meetings .....  | 3  |
| <i>The Seattle Times</i> Editorial .....                    | 5  |
| <i>The Seattle Times</i> Online letters to the editor ..... | 5  |
| Conclusion .....  | 6  |
| Appendix 1: KCLS Branches .....                             | 7  |
| Appendix 2: KCLS Board of Trustees .....                    | 8  |
| Appendix 3: KCLS Mission, Vision, and Values .....          | 9  |
| Appendix 4: Presentation of the Ad Hoc Group .....          | 11 |

### **Overview of the King County Library System**

The King County Library System (KCLS) is one of the largest circulating libraries in the United States employing 1200 employees and operating 47 libraries and related facilities (Appendix 1), including a Traveling Library Center, a mobile TechLab, and the ABC Express children's library van. In 2003, KCLS circulated nearly 16 million items and served more than 1.1 million residents. Currently, property taxes account for 94% of the KCLS revenue. Funding measures for the system passed in 1966, 1977, 1980, 1988, 2002 and 2004. In 2005, the KCLS revenue budget was \$77 million or about \$108 for each King County household. In 2006, the system had an operating budget of more than \$80 million. The library system began in 1942 when voters in King County established

the King County Rural Library District.<sup>1</sup> Its mission was to provide library services to people in rural areas who had limited access to city libraries.

## Governance

The five-member Board of Trustees governs the KCLS (Appendix 2). Board members are appointed for five-year terms, with no trustee serving more than two consecutive terms. Trustees are nominated by the King County Executive and confirmed by the County Council. KCLS and the County seek geographic representation within its service area, although there is no specific requirement to do so. Citizens interested in serving as trustees submit their names for consideration through KCLS, the County Council member representing their district, or directly to the County Executive. Board meetings are held a minimum of four times a year in community libraries throughout the district.

The KCLS Board of Trustees sets policy for library services throughout the District and is guided by the KCLS Mission and Vision statements (Appendix 3). The Board hires and holds accountable KCLS Director Bill Ptacek, who has served as the KCLS director since 1989.

The enabling legislation is contained in RCW 27.12 and provides for appointment, powers and duties of trustees, levying of taxes, reporting on revenues and disbursements, issuance of general obligation bonds, annexation of cities or towns, and other matters. The Library Board follows the rules of the Open Public Meetings Act, Public Disclosure Commission and the State of Washington's financial guidelines, including an annual audit.

## Issues

The CRC has heard from several citizens who are concerned about the KCLS; these are the changes that citizens have recommended:

1. Assign oversight for the KCLS Board of Trustees to the King County Council (5 comments)
  - to provide stronger governance;
  - to increase accountability; and
  - to ensure a fully engaged Board of Trustees.
2. Increase communication and leadership and establish more oversight of the board of trustees (an example of the need for this the executive's performance in siting the Black Diamond library).
3. Extend KCLS hours.

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<sup>1</sup> **RCW 27.12.010 (5)** "Rural county library district" means a library serving all the area of a county not included within the area of incorporated cities and towns: PROVIDED, That any city or town with a population of one hundred thousand or less at the time of annexation may be included therein as provided in RCW [27.12.360](#) through [27.12.390](#);

4. Incorporate KCLS into King County as a separate department, with the Board of Commissioners [sic?] serving as a citizens' oversight board, and with budget oversight by the Council, similar to City of Seattle library structure.
  - To resolve conflict with KCLS employees and the public regarding management and financial issues
5. Consider combining the Seattle library and KCL systems.
6. Make KCLS directly responsible to an elected entity (citizen groups are concerned about the mismanagement of KCLS and its lack of responsiveness to library patrons).
7. Make the KCLS director and board elected positions.

### **Ad Hoc Group of King County Library System Patrons**

We recommend a charter amendment to make the King County Council the oversight authority for the KCLS Board of Trustees. This would provide a stronger governance structure and help to ensure a fully engaged Board of Trustees. It would provide a needed additional measure of accountability of the Board of Trustees, while ensuring that checks and balances are in place.

Presentation to the Charter Review Commission

June 26, 2007

The Ad Hoc Group has been a strong voice for change in the leadership of the KCLS. Representatives spoke at seven of the public meetings that the CRC held during June and July 2007. In its presentation of June 26, Ad Hoc Group representatives identified a number of problems facing KCLS and proposed the above recommendation as a way to address them (Appendix 4). Their concerns focused primarily on the Board and a lack of oversight of its workings. In addition, they expressed concerns about the absence of a public process for planning and decision making, particularly financial decision making. The Ad Hoc Group also argued that the Board failed to respond to the findings and recommendations of an independent evaluation of KCLS management and operations.

### **Reports and other resources**

#### **Board Meetings**

In the **February 27, 2007 meeting of the Board of Trustees**, initial discussion focused on the Waldron report<sup>2</sup>, which identified the following problems plaguing KCLS:

- poor communication;
- lack of planning;
- inadequate implementation; and
- ineffective leadership and management.

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<sup>2</sup> *King County Library System Cluster Model Evaluation*, Report compiled January 23, 2007, Waldron & Company.

These areas were identified as adversely affecting the morale of KCLS staff. Referring to the Director's Report and the findings of the Waldron report, a spokesperson for the Ad Hoc Group recommended that the Board and staff formulate a strategy to restore patron confidence in KCLS. Another spokesperson for the Ad Hoc group said that the soul of KCLS is the Vision, which states "KCLS is the heart of the community." He asked whether KCLS actions have been consistent with this direction and if KCLS is in danger of losing its soul on the altar of business and bureaucratic expediency.

In the **March 27, 2007 Board of Trustees meeting**, the minutes show that Gary Robinson, representing the Ad Hoc Group, noted incidences in which KCLS failed to communicate with or solicit comments and input from library patrons. He said that LeRoy McCullough's characterization of the Waldron report as "painful" resonated with patrons' views. Mr. Robinson pointed out that the Waldron report provided commentary on executive performance, lack of leadership, mismanagement and a failure to communicate. He reminded the Board that the concept of the library is to serve patrons who pay for the service and not to serve management and the director.

Another citizen suggested that the Board always be mindful of the branch libraries where the patrons and the communities are served. She quoted a portion of the KCLS value: "We value the involvement of our public, our customers by recognizing that it is for them that we provide service."

In addition, Jim Bowen discussed issues that cause patrons and staff to believe there's been a lack of good judgment and leadership in the planning and implementation of systems and in financial planning. He discussed the potentially misguided and ill-informed purchase of very expensive equipment. He added that the 2006 implementation of clustering among KCLS libraries had resulted in the upheaval of staff, inefficiencies and low morale as documented in the Waldron report. Finally, he said the potentially most costly example is the submission of the 2004 construction bond plan without a plan to staff the new and expanded libraries. On behalf of the patrons of 19 KCLS libraries, Mr. Bowen asked the Board to address the issues of staffing the new construction at the next Board meeting.

Barbara Spindel of the Ad Hoc group said Waldron & Company's independent evaluation of clustering pointed out great deficiencies in communication between staff, managers and the directorate. If the Board is basing the Director's performance evaluation only upon information from the upper level of management, she said they will have less than a complete picture. Ms. Spindel asked the Board to clarify for the public whether, in the process of evaluation, they would be addressing all staff, librarians, managers, patrons and friends groups, as well as from those from the directorate level.

## ***The Seattle Times***

### **Editorial (June 11, 2006)**

In its editorial, "Save the King Co. library system," the Times identified KCLS as the second busiest library system in the nation and noted the following challenges:

- Library workers voted overwhelmingly (92 percent of those voting) that they had no confidence in longtime director Bill Ptacek's management. Calls for his ouster center on his management style and a controversial reorganization of library staff. In May 2006, 80 library workers and patrons demonstrated before a trustees meeting, carrying signs that read, "No confidence," and "Low morale = loss of service."
- A threatened 60-year-old reciprocal-use agreement between Seattle and King County library systems, which allowed patrons to use either system without cost. At the time of the editorial, budget cuts in Seattle was leading city residents to use county libraries more than county residents used city libraries. Although Seattle paid King County \$104,000/year for several years to offset the imbalance, KCLS estimated the disparity at nearly \$1 million. [Question: What is the status of this threat now?]

### **Online letters to the editor (July 3, 2006)**

You were right to say the King County Library System should be saved as the crown jewel ["Save the King Co. library system," Times, editorial, June 11]! It is fast disappearing. The Board of Trustees has allowed Director Bill Ptacek's four-year clustering experiment — with a few libraries in the south-end — to infect all 43 community libraries.

This contamination was allowed without the due diligence of evaluation and investigation. Why no evaluation of the four years? Because an evaluation, done by unbiased professionals outside of KCLS Service Center, would show the fallacy of clustering.

Community library patrons/tax payers from across King County have given written notice of no confidence to the board. The recently unionized community library employees voted no confidence by a resounding 92 percent.

Ptacek simply shrugs off these results as insignificant. That's a big group of community library users and community library employees to shrug off.

Ptacek continues full throttle ahead while patrons and library employees continue to be ignored. Why?

Yes, patrons and staff also want the crown jewel of 43 well-appointed libraries saved and we are working hard to do just that.

— ***Phyllis Forister, Renton***

I was so pleased to read "Save the King Co. library system." I have been discouraged because, as a patron and taxpayer, my voice has been ignored by the King County Library Board, Ptacek and my King County councilman, Reagan Dunn.

I have expressed my concern about the clustering issue and how it has negatively affected my library experience, but had no response. I, too, would vote no confidence for Ptacek.

I am glad The Times is finally bringing attention to this issue. If I could redo my vote on the library bond, I would vote no.

— *Sara Denman, Maple Valley*

## **Conclusion**

The CRC has been asked to consider recommending one or more charter amendments that would address what critics view as weaknesses in the KCLS governance structure. Proponents of these amendments believe that KCLS leadership needs to be more responsive and accountable to the public that it serves.






Respectfully submitted by Becky Spithill

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## Appendix 1: KCLS Branches

1. Algona-Pacific Library
2. Auburn Library
3. Bellevue Regional Library
4. Black Diamond Library
5. Bothell Regional Library
6. Boulevard Park Library
7. Burien Library
8. Carnation Library
9. Covington Library
10. Des Moines Library
11. Duvall Library
12. Fairwood Library
13. Fall City Library
14. Federal Way Regional Library
15. Federal Way 320th Library
16. Foster Library
17. Issaquah Library
18. Kenmore Library
19. Kent Regional Library
20. Kingsgate Library
21. Kirkland Library
22. Lake Forest Park Library
23. Lake Hills Library
24. Library Connection at Crossroads
25. Library Connection at Southcenter
26. Maple Valley Library
27. Mercer Island Library
28. Muckleshoot Library
29. Newport Way Library
30. North Bend Library
31. Redmond Regional Library
32. Richmond Beach Library
33. Sammamish Library
34. Service Center
35. Shoreline Library
36. Skykomish Library
37. Skyway Library
38. Snoqualmie Library
39. Techlab
40. The Traveling Library Center (TLC)
41. Tukwila Library
42. Valley View Library
43. Vashon Library
44. White Center Library
45. Woodinville Library
46. Woodmont Library
47. Youth Service Center Library

## Appendix 2: Board of Trustees

| Board Member:  | Term Expires: |
|--|---------------|
|  <b>Judge LeRoy McCullough</b><br>President | 1/1/2009      |
|  <b>Lucy Krakowiak</b><br>Secretary         | 1/1/2010      |
|  <b>Charlotte B. Spitzer</b>                | 1/1/2008      |
|  <b>Judge Richard Eadie</b>                | 1/1/2012      |
|  <b>Jessica Bonebright</b>                | 1/1/2011      |



## Appendix 3: KCLS Mission, Vision, and Values

### Mission

The mission of the King County Library System is to provide free, open and equal access to ideas and information to all members of the community.

### Principles of Service

- Provide open, non-judgmental access to collections and services without regard to race, citizenship, age, educational level, economic status, religion, or any other qualification or condition.
- Provide free access to, and promote the communication of, ideas and information.
- Advocate and support First Amendment rights and the Library Bill of Rights, and protect library materials from censorship.
- Create an environment which encourages users to encounter the rich diversity of concepts on which a democratic society depends.

### Goals

- Provide collections and services to meet community needs and interests.
- Promote the King County Library System and the awareness and use of library resources, services and programs.
- Develop and maintain working relationships with other libraries and with cultural, educational, social and informational agencies.
- Attract and develop a high-quality staff with special skills, knowledge and abilities to help library users. Create an environment which motivates staff to achieve high levels of performance and productivity.
- Exercise prudence in the utilization of human, financial and physical resources.
- Utilize appropriate technologies to maintain and improve library operations and services.
- Provide and maintain appropriate facilities.

### Vision

#### An Intellectual Adventure for Everyone

The King County Library System builds valued relationships with our users so they can grow in knowledge and wisdom. We're here to spark curiosity and growth. KCLS guides patrons to an unparalleled collection of stories, books, computers, CDs, Internet resources, services, and programs. The choices will surprise you.

#### The Heart of the Community

Our libraries are the knowledge commons for our communities. The buildings themselves reflect the community. The staff's passion to have libraries change lives is expressed in the arrangement and presentation of materials and services. It is at the library that relationships are formed among staff, patrons, and ideas. Creating this bond helps forge healthy, vibrant, informed, and economically viable communities.

#### We make it Easy

Convenience for patrons drives our service. We seek to understand what patrons need. Libraries are strategically located and designed with an eye toward patron self-sufficiency. Resources are organized and delivered to reduce barriers. Technology gives access beyond that which can be provided in person or in print. And always, library staff are here to help.

#### One System

The King County Library System operates as one where unity provides value. The system-wide approach to collections, technology, and general support of library operations frees the staff to concentrate on service, and results in buildings and collections that are maximized around the needs of patrons. This system-wide approach differentiates The King County Library System. It's why KCLS is the best public library in the United States.

### Values

At the heart of all services provided by the King County Library System are certain fundamental values. They are beliefs that unite us and goals that inspire us. Our firm belief that libraries make a difference in people's lives is complemented by the library system's mission to provide free, open and equal access to ideas and information for all members of the community.

The way these core values find expression evolves over time. But the values themselves remain constant. In times of change and challenge, and in pursuit of our mission, we affirm these values.

(Appendix 3 continued)

***We value fair and equal access to information by...***

Providing access for all regardless of qualifications  
Ensuring confidential use of the library and a right to privacy  
Providing diversity in materials and programs that encourage discovery, enhance personal development, support educational and cultural programs and contribute to recreational activities

***We value outstanding public service and strive to...***

Recognize our unique role and responsibilities to act in the public interest  
Emphasize the importance of diversity among our customers and staff provide numerous gateways to information  
Offer new technologies for learning opportunities  
Respond to our customers with information, integrity, courtesy and urgency  
Encourage our staff members to be active in their communities

***We value the involvement of our public, our customers by...***

Recognizing that it is for them that we provide service  
Welcoming comments and responding with honesty and respect seeking opinions on policies and services encouraging links to communities through local library advisory boards, Friends of the Library groups, volunteers and coalitions  
Working together to make a positive contribution to libraries and in society

***We value the people who work with us and for us, and we...***

Attract, develop, reward and retain an outstanding staff  
Treat each other with respect, dignity, fairness and equality  
Create an environment of teamwork, participation and creativity  
Support initiative, diversity and openness to new ideas  
Encourage imagination, vision and humor  
Show respect for our colleagues and their commitment to the highest standards of quality and professionalism  
Develop opportunities for attaining professional and personal goals celebrate our achievements  
Ensure open and honest communication throughout the System  
Recognize the contributions of all staff members, whether in direct service or behind the scenes

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## Appendix 4:

### **Presentation to the Charter Review Commission of King County Ad Hoc Group of King County Library System Patrons**

- There is currently no oversight of the King County Library System Board of Trustees and its stewardship of the King County Library System.
- While the King County Executive and Council nominate and confirm appointments to the KCLS Board of Trustees, once trustees are appointed there is no formal oversight of their activities. This leaves the Board and library system director with no checks and balances, and no accountability to anyone outside the library system.
- The current Board of Trustees has not operated with a full complement for over a year; Board members often arrive late or leave early. Frequently, they do not cover all items on their agenda.
- The Board does not critically question reports given to them by the KCLS director and staff. New systems, construction and huge purchases are not subject to cost-benefit analysis prior to their implementation.
- There is no public process for planning and financial decisions, which are currently made in committee meetings which are closed to the public.
- There is a no transparent justification for expenditures of the 2004 capital bond. There have been no public justifications for why selected libraries are being remodeled, expanded or replaced. In some cases, a library less than ten years old is being replaced.
- There has been a lack of planning on how to staff the new and expanded libraries. This lack of long-range planning has not been addressed by the Board, in spite of repeated patron concern.
- At patron urging, in 2006 the Board authorized an independent evaluation of a newly-imposed management system. The resulting report was a commentary on lack of governance, lack of leadership, mismanagement and failure of system-wide communication. The Board had no public response to the report, and has made no actions or policy based on that report.
- **We recommend a charter amendment to make the King County Council the oversight authority for the KCLS Board of Trustees. This would provide a stronger governance structure and help to ensure a fully engaged Board of Trustees. It would provide a needed additional measure of accountability of the Board of Trustees, while ensuring that checks and balances are in place.**